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CLAIMS

1. A method of forming an optical decoding device to enable hidden information or indicia on an article to be revealed, the method comprising electronically transferring data defining the decoding device from a central source to a remote site, and creating the optical decoding device at the remote site using the transmitted data.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the article comprises an article of value such as a document, for example selected from the group of banknotes, fiscal stamps, certificates of authenticity, cheques, bonds, retail vouchers, postage stamps, passports, identity documents, and travellers cheques.
3. A method according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the central source comprises a database.
4. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the data defines one or more of the colour or black and white content of a decoding image, a line structure, or a 3-D structure.
5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the data defines the colour or black and white content of the decoding device in the form of pixel data or vector data.
6. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the decoding device comprises one or more of an optical filter, a line or dot pattern, coloured filter, curved line structure, concentric circles, geometric figures, microlens arrays, lenticular screens, lenses and Fresnel lenses.
7. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the step of creating the decoding device comprises printing, engraving or ablating the decoding device on a record medium.
8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the record medium comprises paper or plastic.
9. A method according to claim 7 or claim 8, wherein the record medium is transparent.

defining decoding devices corresponding to different levels of security.

20. A method according to claim 19, wherein the level of security of the transferred decoding device is determined in accordance with the identity of the remote site.

21. A method according to any of the preceding claims, further comprising recording details of the identity of a user at a remote site requesting data from the central source.

22. An optical decoding device which has been formed by a method according to any of claims 1 to 21.

23. A method of checking the validity of a security device on an article, the method comprising forming an optical decoding device at a remote site using data transferred electronically from a central source; and viewing the optical decoding device in association with the security device to validate the security device.

24. A method according to claim 23, wherein the article comprises an article of value such as a document, for example selected from the group of banknotes, fiscal stamps, certificates of authenticity, cheques, bonds, retail vouchers, postage stamps, passports, identity documents, and travellers cheques.

25. A method according to claim 23 or claim 24, wherein the security device comprises a hidden code not readily visible to the naked eye.

26. A method according to any of claims 23 to 25, wherein the security device comprises one or more of an array of dots, scrambled indicia, line pattern and metameric feature.

27. A method according to any of claims 23 to 26, wherein the decoding device is formed on a transparent substrate and is placed over the security device to validate it.

28. A method according to any of claims 23 to 27, wherein the forming step is carried out in accordance with any of claims 1 to 21.

29. An optical decoding device forming system comprising a central source for providing data defining an optical decoding device to enable hidden information or indicia on an article to be revealed; a transmission system for
5 transmitting data from the central source to a remote site; and a creation system at the remote site for creating the optical decoding device using the transmitted data.

30. A system according to claim 29, wherein the creation system comprises one of an ink jet printer, laser printer,
10 3D ink jet printing device, laser engraver, laser marker, laser ablating device, laser cutter, fax machine, commercial ink jet, digital press, conventional press or computer operated machine or a display screen, such as a high resolution display screen, monitor or high intensity
15 display.

31. A system according to claim 29 or claim 30, wherein the central source comprises a database.

32. A system according to any of claims 29 to 31, further comprising a processor located at the central source for
20 controlling access to data in the central source.

33. A system according to any of claims 29 to 32, wherein the decoding device comprises an image or indicia which, when viewed in association with a security device, reveals hidden information or indicia within the security device.

25 34. A system according to any of claims 29 to 33, adapted to carry out a method according to any of claims 1 to 21.

35. A decoding device supply system comprising a central source for supplying data defining a decoding device to enable hidden information or indicia on an article to be
30 revealed, to one or more remote sites.

36. A system according to claim 35, wherein the central source comprises a database.